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THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Croglin vampire
Mons: who were the angels?
The mystery of mazes
English MIB threat
Birth and re-birth

145

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THE Unexplained
MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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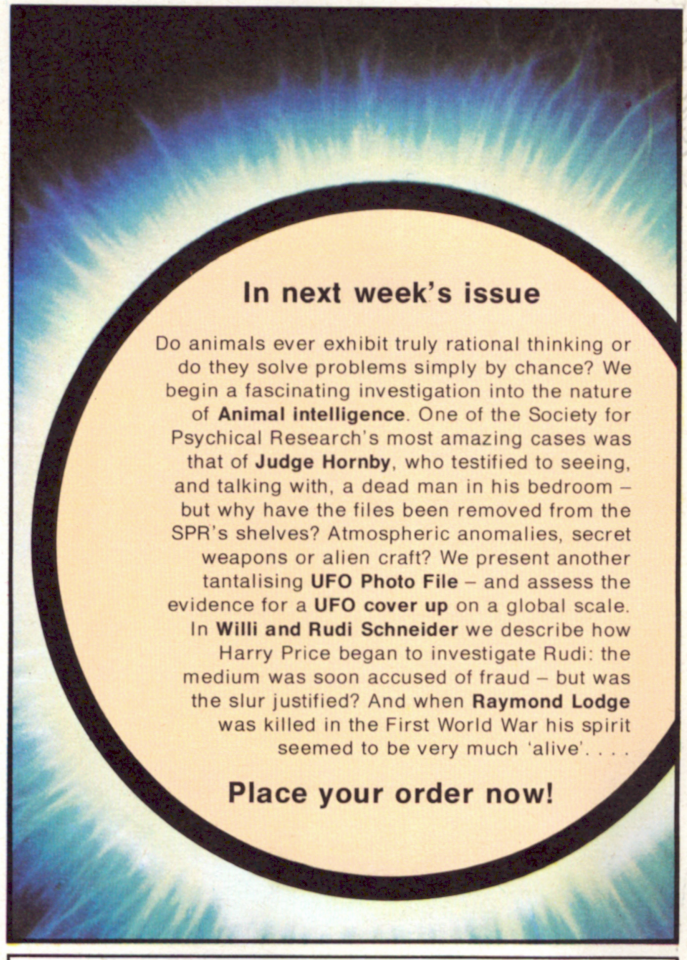

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Last exit for the lost

The spiralling pattern of the maze or labyrinth is found all over the world. Are mazes designed merely for entertainment – to entrap and bewilder – or do they have an altogether deeper and more ancient significance?
PETER JAMES probes the mystery

SCATTERED ACROSS the face of Europe, parts of Africa, Asia and the Americas lie hundreds of mazes and labyrinths. Sometimes made of turf, sometimes of hedges, stone or brick, or sometimes simply two-dimensional pictures on mosaic floors, paintings or rock, mazes can be found in almost every kind of setting. The more recent ones, like the ever-popular hedge-maze at Hampton Court or the great picture maze on the floor of Chartres Cathedral, are often displayed in grand and public places. Others are found on remote mountainsides and in hidden spots, like the superb turf-cut spiral Mizmaze near Breamore, Hampshire, which occupies a hidden clearing in the woods. Local traditions suggest that the Breamore Mizmaze, of unknown date but certainly of great antiquity, was once a prominent centre of folk rituals. Yet despite the fading of its original significance, the Mizmaze has retained its fascination and has been dutifully tended and preserved over uncounted generations into the 20th century. In an age of materialism and high technology, the maze has somehow survived as a delightfully irrational and enjoyable symbol of an essential characteristic of the human condition – bewilderment.

The Mizmaze near Breamore, Hampshire, England – a superb turf-cut maze that occupies a hidden woodland clearing. It is impossible to get lost in the maze – the turfs are so low that the exit route is always visible. It seems that the Mizmaze was designed instead for ritual purposes. There was, for instance, a custom of running the maze – it was said that one person could run from here to Gallows Hill, some half a mile (800 metres) away, and back again in the time that it took another runner to complete the circuit of the Mizmaze

Sadly, we are at present far from an understanding of the reasons behind the building of the mazes. The modern fascination with mazes seems to spring largely from the sheer adventure of becoming completely lost, voluntarily, and finding one's way out only after a thrill of fear that one will never do so. An experiment conducted by Ralph Selby in Nottingham in July 1971 highlights the experience: he set up a complex three-dimensional maze. Invited to crawl through one, or both, floors of a two-storey complex (one lit, the other completely dark), built on a tiny site measuring a mere 34 by 17 feet (10 by 5 metres), visitors were bombarded with disorientating information, including bizarre readings from *Alice in Wonderland* and encounters with self-propelling steel spheres. Seven thousand people participated in the experiment; its designer afterwards summarised their reactions:

> I was surprised by the way a usually cynical public was prepared to suspend

their disbelief – and of course it was the most confident who found themselves more quickly trapped than the cautious. Most visitors reported that moment of heightened awareness of their own reaction, when they realised they couldn't find an immediate exit.

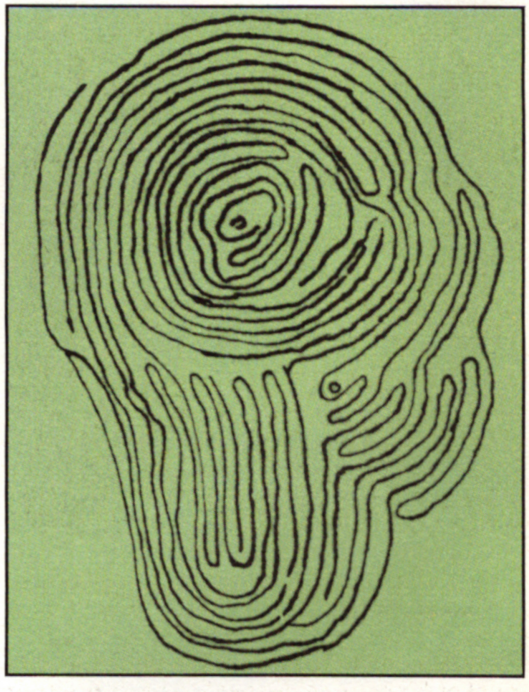
It is possible that heightened awareness obtained in this way is akin to the euphoric giddiness produced by some drugs and was a factor in the religious function of mazes. Certainly spontaneous excitement with a controlled 'unknown' must have stimulated ancient users of maze sites, at which we know the ritual cults involved dance, drama, music and other stimuli. But to attribute the prolific maze-cults of the ancient world simply to a desire to 'get high' may be taking too lightly a solemn cult of ancient Man.

It is just possible to discern, behind the disorderly variety of mazes and labyrinths produced by our ancestors, a meaningful common factor. The main purpose, it seems, was to provide limited access, an entry to a centre cunningly hidden from casual prowlers and penetrable only by the initiated. In the words of Oxford classicist Jackson Knight, 'the primary idea of the labyrinthine form . . . is the exclusion of hostile beings or influences.' In one sense mazes were a symbol of protection, a token 'guard' over the churches, temples, tombs and other sacred places they decorated. Evidently ancient mazes were not simple amusements. But what were they supposed to be guarding? What force, object or idea was potent enough to result in the building of mazes of such similar design over several millennia, from Denmark to South Africa, Spain to India?

The oldest and most famous European maze myth, the Greek story of Theseus and the Minotaur, will perhaps elucidate the problem. Theseus was one of seven youths and seven maidens demanded as tribute by the overlord of Athens, the tyrannical King Minos of Crete. The captives were to be fed as sacrificial victims to the Minotaur, a bull-headed monster who lived at the heart of a gigantic maze, the Cretan labyrinth. This was so complex that even its builder, the legendary architect and inventor Daedalus, had difficulty in finding his way around it; the Athenian victims, once in the labyrinth, would wander hopelessly until the Minotaur caught up with them and devoured them.

Theseus, however, was favoured by the gods, and when he arrived on Crete with the other captives, Minos's daughter Ariadne fell in love with him. Ariadne persuaded Daedalus to reveal the secret of the labyrinth, and at his suggestion gave Theseus a ball of thread, which he trailed from the door of the labyrinth as he entered its sinuous passages. Already an experienced monster-killer, Theseus found the Minotaur in its lair, beat it to death and retraced his steps, following the thread, bringing the other Athenians

Above: a visitor to a maze in an experiment conducted by designer Ralph Selby encounters confusing distortions of himself. Crawling through the complex two-storey maze, many of the participants reported experiencing a moment of heightened awareness when they realised that they could not easily find their way out. Some ancient mazes seem designed to produce the same feeling – perhaps as part of a religious ritual



with him. Then, helped by Ariadne, they escaped to the harbour and sailed for home.

Such is the story of the Cretan labyrinth – but what was its purpose? According to the legendary narrative, the Cretan labyrinth was built simply to house the Minotaur. The existence of the monstrous creature, half man, half bull, wounded the pride of King Minos, for it was the offspring of his own Queen, Pasiphae. She had conceived a passion for, and mated with, a bull – again, with the help of the ingenious Daedalus, who built for Pasiphae a wooden cow, hidden in which she mated with the bull. Outraged, Minos had the labyrinth built to hide the Minotaur,

the result of his wife's scandalous love affair.

There are, of course, some glaring absurdities in the labyrinth legend: since the victims from Athens were publicly rounded up as fodder for the Minotaur, the story that the labyrinth was built as an elaborate way of hiding the monster hardly seems to make any sense. And the narrative of the Cretan labyrinth may be concealing a deeper meaning. For a curiously similar maze tradition from South Africa seems to hint at some more universal significance: a popular Zulu game, played for hours at a time and often while smoking cannabis, is to draw a maze on the ground and to take turns at finding the 'king's hut' marked in the centre without hitting a dead end. Sometimes the game is played with toy armies in the shape of bulls' heads that have to march through the labyrinth to reach an adversary's starting point. Strangely enough, we find in this game, played thousands of miles south of Crete, the same disparate elements that appear in the Minoan legend – kingship, a bull's head and conflict in a labyrinth. We can hardly explain the Zulu myth in terms of King Minos's marital problems – clearly we are dealing with rituals with much broader significance.

The deeper meanings of the labyrinth myth can be elucidated with the help of archaeology. Excavations at the Cretan capital of Knossos at the beginning of the 20th century uncovered evidence of a bull cult practised in a maze-like palace of hundreds of corridors, cloisters and chambers. Scenes on brightly coloured frescoes, dating from around 1400 BC, depict the famous 'bull dance' in which acrobats seized the animal's horns and somersaulted over its back. Tokens of bull worship, such as ceremonial horns, together with other Cretan myths linking the dynasty of Minos with bulls, strongly suggest that the vitality of the Minoan kings, like that of the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, was identified with a bull or bull-god. Thus the search for the source of the 'maze urge' appears to lead us to Egypt, where we may find a common origin for the Cretan and African labyrinths.

Below left: an Athenian vase of the sixth century BC showing Theseus killing the Minotaur, the bull-headed monster that was said to have been imprisoned in a vast maze, the labyrinth on Crete, by Minos, king of the island. According to legend, the Cretan labyrinth was copied from an original in Egypt, where a 'divine' bull (below: the emblem of the god Ptah-Seker-Asari) was ritually killed in place of the sacred pharaoh as a sacrifice for the state. The same disparate elements – the bull, kingship and struggle in a labyrinth – appear in a Zulu game from South Africa. A maze (below far left) is drawn, and toy armies of miniature bulls' heads are marched through it towards a 'king's hut' marked in the centre

Ancient Greek writers actually stated that Daedalus had borrowed his 'invention' of the labyrinth from an original in northern Egypt. Little survives of it today except for a few fragmentary brick courses, but we are lucky enough to have an eyewitness description of its former splendour from the Greek traveller Herodotus, who visited Egypt in the fifth century BC. Somewhat overawed, he commented that 'it must have cost more in money and labour than all the walls and public work of the Greeks put together.' This enormous complex, built by Pharaoh Amenemhet around 1900 BC, consisted of some 3000 rooms, half of which were underground:

> The upper rooms I saw with my own eyes and it is hard to believe they are the work of men; the numerous winding passages through the various courts were an endless wonder to me. I passed from small apartments to spacious halls, and from these to magnificent courts almost without end.

As for its purpose, Herodotus claimed the labyrinth was constructed as a meeting place

A labyrinth carved on a rock face in Rocky Valley, near Tintagel, Cornwall. Identical examples of this, perhaps the most widespread of all the basic maze patterns, are found on ancient coins from Knossos, as a sacred symbol among the Hopi Indians, and as a Manas-Chakra, a religious emblem, in Rajasthan, India

and burial ground for the Egyptian kings. This second, funerary, aspect seems to have been most important – there is archaeological evidence from as long ago as 3000 BC of labyrinths associated with royal tombs. Maze patterns on seals left in graves, convoluted architectural designs surrounding royal tombs and clues preserved in religious texts have been pieced together by Egyptologists to tell a story that may explain the Cretan and Zulu labyrinth traditions. In Egypt, as in many other ancient cultures (see page 1908), the sacred king seems to have been ritually 'killed' as a sacrifice for the state. The sacrifice was, however, only token – a 'divine' bull was substituted for the king in the culmination of several days of ritual dance, drama and combat performed in a labyrinth complex. A similar cult must lie behind the Cretan myth. The Minotaur – the 'bull of Minos' – would have been the representative of the kingship and power of Minos; and Theseus, by killing the bull and taking the king's daughter, was clearly claiming the throne.

In the opinion of ancient historian C. N. Deedes, who studied the evolution of the maze from ancient Egypt to medieval Europe, the plan and meaning of the labyrinth clearly originated in Egypt, where it was the scene of the religious dramas involved in 'killing' the god-king in the shape of a bull. Many other scholars would concur. But although this theory may explain why bull, king and labyrinth occur together in both Crete and Egypt, it does not really explain the importance and meaning of the labyrinth shape itself – or why the same design is found all over the world.

While many archaeologists of the old-fashioned school that believed that all civilisations diffused from ancient Egypt might be content with the idea that the maze pattern and labyrinth cults were derived from Amenemhet's labyrinth, the sheer volume of evidence of an independent maze tradition in Europe suggests that this is not the whole truth. The Egyptian labyrinths were always composed of straight lines, and the abstract mazes on seals were usually made up of square fret patterns. Cretan coins from classical times often depict labyrinths, but while some seem to be of the Egyptian fretwork kind, the maze usually shown is of a quite different construction – the square or rounded spiral design of European tradition, never found in Egypt.

Troy mazes

The spiralling maze – the basic maze of Europe – consists of a series of interlocking concentric bands, often seven in number, with a straight line of exit running from the centre to the base. This is the form taken by practically all the ancient mazes of Europe, including all those known to have been centres of folk activity – festivals, dancing, games – presumably since prehistoric times. As late as the 19th century these mazes were being cut from turf by farmers and peasants in Scotland, Wales and Ireland. They are known locally as 'Troytowns' – for reasons that remain obscure. Spiral maze sites with names apparently derived from the word 'Troy' are found all over Europe – in Wales, England, Italy, Germany, Sweden, Norway and Russia. The Scandinavian examples are usually built from rounded stones set into the ground and are often found by the coast; they are perhaps connected with the megalithic cultures of prehistoric Europe.

These megalithic cultures, it is now widely accepted, developed independently of influence from the ancient Near East and Egypt, and radiocarbon dates now show that many of our oldest megalithic henges and chambered tombs date from between 5000 and 3500 BC, *before* the first flowering of Egyptian civilisation. Since there is absolutely nothing Egyptian about the Troy mazes – and every reason to see them as a part of our megalithic heritage, like Stonehenge or Avebury – any idea of an Egyptian origin must be abandoned. This reasoning is amply confirmed by the spiral symbols, some of them approaching the spiral labyrinth shapes of the later Troy mazes, found carved on the earliest megalithic monuments of Europe. Most of these spiral shapes, strangely enough, are found at tomb sites, such as the magnificent chambered tomb of Newgrange, Ireland, the walls of which are spattered with spiral carvings.

Here, in the maze-like spirals of the megalithic tombs and the labyrinthine structures of Egyptian royal tombs, we find that

Left: a turf maze – untended but still just discernible – at Alkborough, Humberside, and a spiral detail (below) from a kerbstone in the Newgrange passage grave in County Meath, Ireland. The same spiral motif appears in the Nazcan desert lines (bottom) in Peru

two independent aspects of the maze puzzle meet – and that what they have in common is human mortality. What did Theseus find and conquer in the Cretan labyrinth? One obvious answer is death. So was the labyrinth, first and foremost, a symbol of the underworld? Perhaps it was: another Greek myth shows Theseus to be one of the few heroes of the ancient world to have visited Hades and returned. The point that Theseus returned is important. The Egyptian 'killing' of the pharaoh-god, incarnate as a bull, in a labyrinthine structure representing the prison-like underworld, was a ritual meant to ensure the revitalisation rather than destruction of the king's power. Like the god Osiris, he would descend into the land of the dead (at least by proxy, in the form of a bull), only to be resurrected.

From the ancient perspective, the maze was an excellent symbol of the nether world. Once in it, ordinary mortals would be trapped and die; but the initiated could return from the depths and conquer death. The basic maze of Europe and Crete may have been a map of the underworld, but it was essentially a spiral that turned back upon itself, symbolising a return from whatever lay at the centre – even if the way was difficult and hidden. In pre-Christian times, the maze spiral appears to have been used as a symbol of resurrection. But whatever its symbolism, one question remains: why was the maze shape chosen, over again, as a symbol of the meeting of life and death?

On page 2950: local maze traditions – and the mystical significance of the number seven

To be or not to be

A programme of mass hypnotic regression carried out by the American psychologist Helen Wambach seems to provide strong evidence for the survival of death. But how valid are her results? SUE BLACKMORE investigates

DO WE CHOOSE to be born? Do we choose our sex, the time of our birth – and even our mother? Have we chosen to live other lives before our own? Helen Wambach's group hypnotic sessions suggest that the answers to these questions may be 'yes'.

Helen Wambach is an American psychologist who, disillusioned with teaching standard psychology courses, began to explore automatic writing, table-turning and mediumship – and finally concluded that she could learn the most about human nature by using hypnosis to explore what she termed 'life before life'.

Her technique is to hypnotise large groups of people all at once. The members of the group – consisting of perhaps 40, 50 or even more people – lie on the floor and prepare themselves for a lengthy hypnotic session. Then begins the process of suggestion: Helen Wambach's voice says: 'Your eyes are closed and it feels good to close your eyes. The muscles of your face relax.' The subjects feel themselves sinking into an ever deeper state of relaxation, as Wambach guides them into the desired state.

Above: Helen Wambach, whose mass regressive hypnosis sessions have, she claims, yielded convincing evidence for reincarnation. It would clearly be absurd to ask all the hypnosis subjects in a mass session to recount their experiences while in trance; instead, Helen Wambach supplies them with data sheets (above right), which the participants are requested to fill in when they have regained normal consciousness

'Search your memory' is the next instruction, and everyone is asked to visualise a photograph of themselves as a teenager, as a small child, and as an infant. As the process of relaxation continues, Wambach suggests that each person becomes a pinpoint of consciousness floating close to the ceiling of the room; she then leads them around the building in which the session is taking place, on a kind of guided out-of-the-body fantasy. There is just one more stage, in which Wambach suggests to her subjects that their brainwaves are slowing to 5 cycles per second. She then tells them to go back to a time before they were born.

Obviously not everyone can start to recount past lives at once. A room of 50 hypnotised subjects all talking together would be chaos. Instead, Wambach asks them to remember their experiences and to fill in a data sheet after the session. Using this method, she finds that 90 per cent of her subjects recall having past lives, and just under 50 per cent can remember their existence between lives and the moments

before they were born.

An advantage of this group method is that large amounts of information can be collected. Indeed, Wambach says that one of the problems is that there is too much material. She has regressed over 1000 people, who reported an average of five past lives each, from as long ago as 2000 BC right up to 1945. Some intriguing findings have emerged from these data.

One woman reported having been a middle-class housewife in 16th-century Venice, a servant girl in 18th-century Normandy, a boy who died aged eight of smallpox and a common seaman from Norway who died in 1916. Whether such people really existed is, of course, difficult to check, but reports in which specific names and dates are given or that mention historical figures can be researched. Wambach claims that, out of over 1000 data sheets analysed, only 11 showed clear historical errors. She also says that her subjects' descriptions of everyday life – the clothes they wore, the food they ate, and so on – are astonishingly accurate.

Wambach found that 49 per cent of the past lives she analysed were as females, and 51 per cent as males. This, of course, matches the actual distribution of males and females in the population very closely. She also found that the number of 'lives' reported around AD 400 was half that reported around 1600, and that the number doubled again around 1850 – matching, as she pointed out, the growth of the world's population. Could these findings have come about if the subjects were merely imagining past lives? Wambach argues that this could happen only if her subjects really had lived before.

Above: a 16th-century Greek illustration from a treatise on hunting and (left) a 15th-century illumination from a French manuscript. Helen Wambach supports her claim that her hypnosis subjects recall genuine past lives with a statistical analysis of their descriptions of life at various periods. To check her data, however, one would have to be able to say, for instance, what kind of clothes people were wearing *throughout the world* in 1450

After the subjects had recalled various past lives, they were taken to the death of each life and asked to live through it. Only around 10 per cent were upset or felt sorrow at their own deaths; indeed, over half described death as pleasant. One wrote:

> Dying was like being released, like going home again. It was as though a great burden had been lifted when I left my body and floated up toward the light. I felt affection for the body I had lived in in that lifetime, but it was so good to be free!

Unique to Wambach's work is her exploration of the period between lifetimes and before birth. The average interval between lives is apparently 52 years, and people can be taken back to remember what that time was like. Generally the sensation is likened to floating on a cloud – but at its end comes the difficult decision to be born again.

Wambach tells her deeply hypnotised group: 'I want you to go now to the time just before you were born into your current lifetime. Are you choosing to be born?' The hypnotist asks why the subjects chose the latter half of the 20th century for this life, why they chose their particular sex, what their purpose is in this lifetime and who, from this life, they have known in previous lives.

Out of a group of 54 people hypnotised in Chicago in 1978, nearly half answered these questions, and many did so with tears in their eyes. It seems that reliving birth is far more traumatic than reliving death. One woman declared:

> I felt such compassion for that baby who was me. I felt such sadness to leave the place where I was to come back into physical life. It seemed so hard to be confined in a little body, and to lose the lightness and the love I had known in the between-life state. . . . I realise that birth is not a joyous occasion. The two deaths I had in the two past lives tonight were very pleasant experiences. It's getting born that seems the tragedy.

Eighty-one per cent of subjects said that they chose to be born; for many, however, it was with reluctance, and only after consulting others.

When asked why they chose the latter half of the 20th century for their reincarnation, many were unable to say, but a large number claimed that it was a time of great potential for spiritual growth, 'an important and exciting age to be born into'. Asked about their choice of sex, many appeared to be indifferent; in fact, Wambach points out that none of her 750 subjects felt their 'true, inner

Nineteenth-century illustrations of the biblical parable of the king and his servants (above left), set in Old Testament times; of Jesus feeding the multitudes (above); and of the medieval Arthurian romances (above right). Wambach believes that her subjects' detailed descriptions of life in various periods of history cannot be the outcome of mere fantasy – but many of them tally closely with the romanticised images offered by children's books and Bible illustrations

self' to be of either sex.

Many of the subjects felt that their session under hypnosis had revealed their purpose in life. It was not to grow rich, famous or powerful but, in almost every case, to learn and to help and to love others, 'to learn patience and love of my fellow man'. Reaching this realisation during the hypnotic sessions sometimes had a profound effect on subjects, and many went away feeling that they were in some way 'better' for their experience.

Among the unexpected findings was the high proportion – 81 per cent of those who answered the questions – who claimed to have known present friends or relatives in past lives. Arthur Guirdham has publicised the notion of group reincarnation, and other hypnotists have suggested the existence of something similar. But if Wambach's findings are to be believed, this is commonplace. Fathers and mothers in this life were lovers, friends, brothers and sisters in past lives. In one case, 'I knew my mother before because we had been together at a convent in the 1200s. I saw a close friend of mine as a teenager in Russia, where I knew him.' For some people, groups of friends and relatives worked together through different lives. For others, difficult relationships had to be worked upon. 'I sensed my father and I have been working on this relationship in several past lives, and we have still not cleared it up.' Wambach concludes that it is only when we feel nothing but compassion and affection for others that we are freed from the need to live over and over again with the same spirits.

It seems that abortion cannot be called murder, if Wambach's findings are to be believed. She asked when people had entered the foetus. A few claimed it was early on in the mother's pregnancy, but the majority did not experience being part of it until at least the sixth month. A large group – 33 per cent – said that they did not join the foetus, or experience being inside it, until just before, or even during, the actual birth.

For most, the birth itself was frightening, sad or confusing. Wambach had suggested that her subjects should feel no pain, but many still found it unpleasant. One was terrified of being taken away from her mother, another felt angry at the bright lights and a third felt lost and cold. Another commented, 'This is going to be a lonely trip.'

Wambach concluded that her results could not be produced by fantasy alone. But could they?

Experience and expectation

Imagine you are one of Wambach's subjects. When the hypnotic session is over, you are presented with a sheet of paper on which are all the questions Wambach asked during the session. You are to write down all your answers. What will you write?

One possibility is that you may have 'seen' nothing during the hypnotic 'trip'. In this case, will you leave the data sheet entirely blank – or will you make something up? About 10 per cent of Wambach's subjects admitted that they experienced no past lives and, when questioned about times between lives, nearly half wrote nothing on their sheets. Wambach explained this by saying that these people had gone too 'deep' into hypnosis to be able to recall anything, but were the figures themselves right? We cannot be sure that there were not more people who made something up to please the hypnotist.

A second possibility is that you may

indeed have seen vivid images, but be quite convinced that they came from your own imagination or memory; they may even remind you of books you have read, or films you have seen. When you write all this down, will you note your feelings about where the images came from? Or will you just describe the scenes? Wambach does not mention having questioned subjects about this possibility.

Wambach argues that the fact that past lives are divided roughly equally between the sexes would not arise if people were making up those lives. But would it? What her evidence does not tell us is how many people changed sex in past lives. Other studies have found, typically, that only about 10 per cent of people change sex when regressed. If this figure is the same for men as for women, and if Wambach's sample contained roughly equal numbers of each sex, then Wambach's result would arise quite naturally – and would not prove anything about the truth of her subjects' statements.

The same can be said of the way in which the number of past lives increases as the world's population increases. Most Americans learn more about recent history than about ancient history. So the increase of reported past lives with time may be a reflection not of the increase in world population – but of the increasing knowledge of the subjects of the period concerned.

There is also the difficult question of the accuracy of descriptions of past life. Wambach gives many graphs full of analyses of different types of clothing and footwear worn in lives of different periods, types of food eaten, but it is hard to compare such findings with actual historical facts. For example, a graph shows that of those who reported lives around the year AD 500, about 50 per cent wore sandals, hides and rags, 5 per cent shoes, boots or slippers and 45 per cent had bare feet. Bearing in mind that these reports allegedly come from all over the world, how would one go about checking the data historically?

When we go on to the data on life between lives and the birth experiences it becomes even harder to check details. We can only speculate about what it is like to be a foetus, so it is difficult to assess the accuracy of the descriptions.

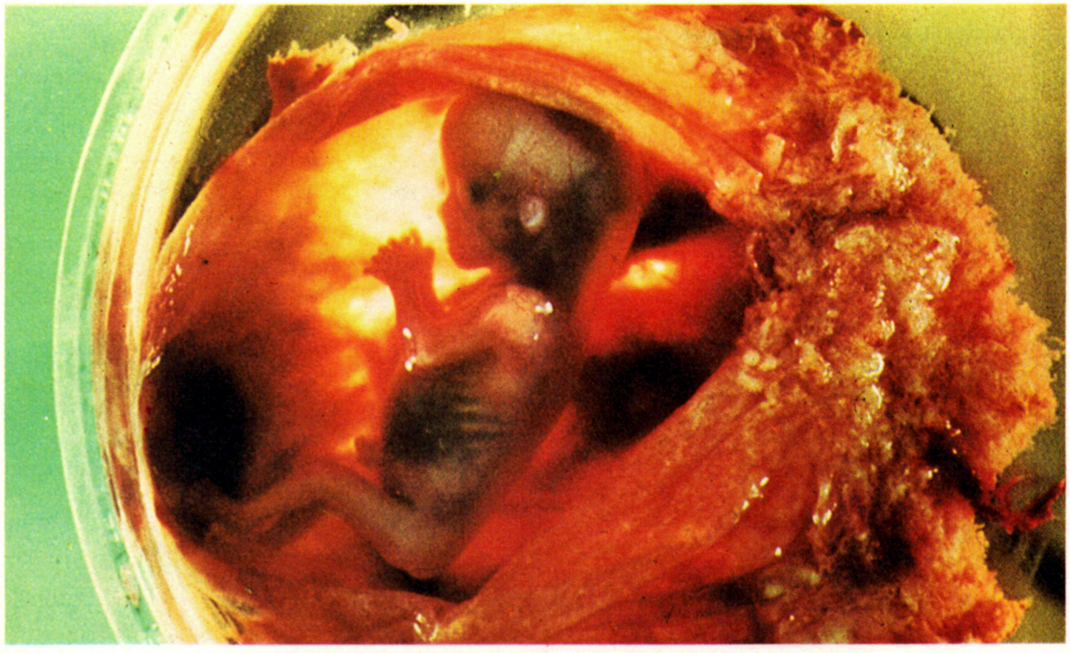
The typical account is of an arduous and even painful journey down the birth canal, followed by the unpleasant experience of emerging into an unwelcoming world of cold and bright lights. Some descriptions include details of the birth – but Wambach seems not to have checked whether they correspond with reality by asking the mother of the subject or by checking medical records.

Some accounts, however, are easy to dismiss as products of the imagination:

> In the birth canal I found it hard to breathe and stuffy, and I was aware of pressure all over, especially on my head. I felt like I was flailing my arms. When I emerged I felt frightened and lonely.

A foetus, of course, has no need to breathe.

These are just some of the problems arising from Wambach's work that invite scepticism as to its value. It may help the subjects to learn about themselves; it may be an educational and interesting experience. However, the evidence is far too weak to support all those claims that people really did go back to past lives. More evidence may be forthcoming to change this view, but in the meantime it seems that the most likely hypothesis is that Wambach's results can be accounted for by subconscious fabrication, compliance, imagination and her subjects' accurate memory of their experience.



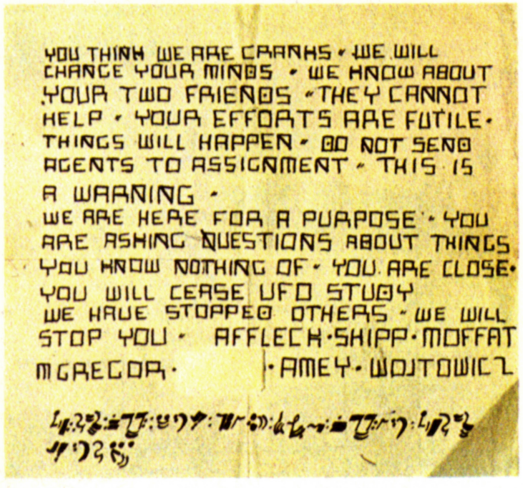
A foetus in the amniotic sac. Part of Wambach's regressive hypnosis technique is to make her subjects relive their births into various lives. One surprising finding is that most participants claimed that they entered the foetus only at a very late stage – sometimes actually during the birth process

Further reading

Helen Wambach, *Life before life*, Bantam 1981
Helen Wambach, *Reliving past lives: the evidence under hypnosis*, Arrow 1982

'Do not meddle-or else'

Weird voices over the telephone, bizarre written messages, tales of a crashed flying saucer, threats and warnings – a respected UFO study group was plagued by all of these for several months. MARTIN SHIPP tells how it set out to bring the 'alien' down to Earth


YOU THINK WE ARE CRANKS • WE WILL CHANGE YOUR MINDS • WE KNOW ABOUT YOUR TWO FRIENDS • THEY CANNOT HELP • YOUR EFFORTS ARE FUTILE • THINGS WILL HAPPEN • DO NOT SEND AGENTS TO ASSIGNMENT • THIS IS A WARNING •
WE ARE HERE FOR A PURPOSE • YOU ARE ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THINGS YOU KNOW NOTHING OF • YOU ARE CLOSE • YOU WILL CEASE UFO STUDY
WE HAVE STOPPED OTHERS • WE WILL STOP YOU • AFFLECK • SHIPP • MOFFAT MCGREGOR • • AMEY • WOJTOWICZ

threatened the investigators' welfare if they did not stop their investigations. The first of them came on Monday, 18 August 1980. On that day SCUFORI member Charles Affleck found on his doorstep a small, shrivelled-up plastic bag, which appeared to have been damaged by heat. Inside he found a piece of paper addressed to SCUFORI. The message simply said:

CEASE UFO STUDY
DO NOT MEDDLE OR ELSE

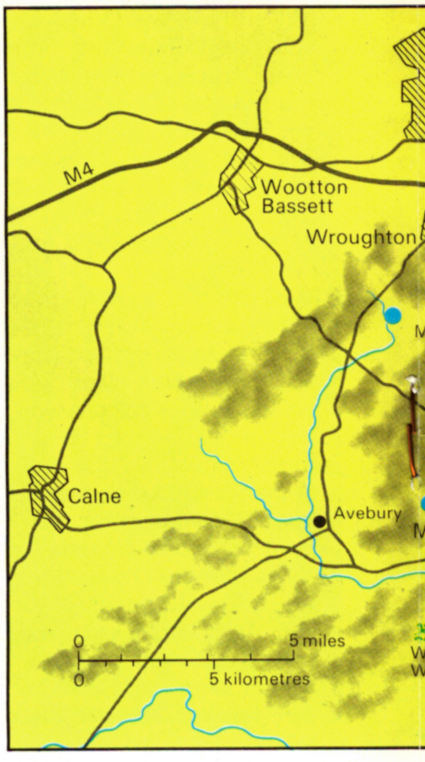
The message was followed by a jumble of squiggles resembling Arabic script.

Affleck was astonished and immediately called an emergency meeting of the group. That evening the message was discussed and the group members jokingly blamed each other for it. They regarded the whole episode as something of a joke. As little more could be done the matter was dropped.

To everyone's surprise, a second message was received two days later, this time through the post. It read:

BEWARE WE ARE WATCHING YOU ALL
DO NOT INTERFERE
WE WILL MEET

The group was still of the opinion that this



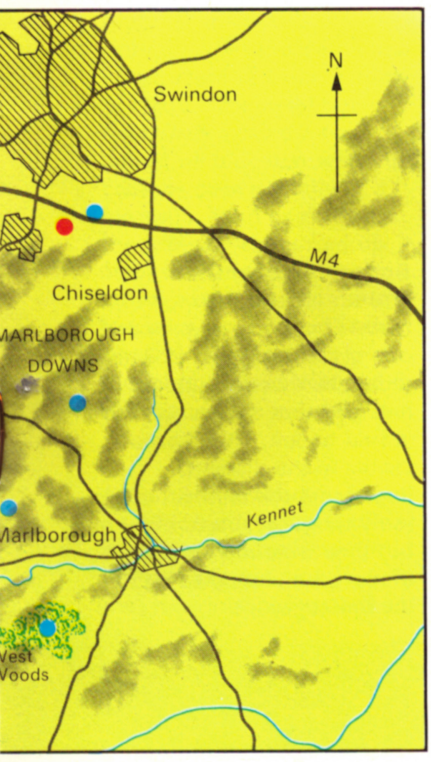
'MEN IN BLACK' had their hey-day in the 1950s and 1960s. They were the mysterious visitors, clad in black and of a darkish complexion, who were said to have visited many prominent ufologists and made vague threats against them. They were said to have had some successes: some ufologists were reputed to have been silenced. (See page 510.)

In those days most ufologists believed UFOs to be 'flying saucers', spacecraft piloted by extra-terrestrials. Visits by men in black (MIBs) and threatening telephone calls and letters were due either to the aliens or to government agents trying to stifle the investigators' research. None of this was proved, but it fitted in neatly with the spaceship theory.

The ufologist of today is on the whole a cooler and more objective investigator. He is open to a much wider range of possibilities as to the source of UFOs; alien spaceships and MIBs are out of favour and largely forgotten. So when a case reminiscent of MIBs was thrust onto a serious UFO group in 1980 the past seemed to be returning.

The group in question was the Swindon Centre for UFO Research and Investigation (SCUFORI), in western England. Its members are recuited by invitation only – there are only six.

Mysterious messages disrupted SCUFORI's research for four months. During this period over 30 messages, sent by post and over the telephone, were received. They



Above: blue points mark places in the Swindon area where messages to or from the 'aliens' were left. The red dot marks the scene of a trap laid by SCUFORI

Above left: one of the disconcerting and only semi-comprehensible messages

Left: this picture of a 'grounded UFO' was presented to SCUFORI. On investigation it proved to be part of a sewage system

was all some kind of joke and that the joker would soon reveal himself.

The following week three telephone calls were received by two members in their respective homes. The 'messages' consisted of three bleeps followed by a jumble of weird electronic noises and finally three further bleeps; they lasted from 10 to 20 seconds.

A third letter arrived on 3 September and read:

IT SEEMS THAT YOU INTEND TO
CONTINUE TO INTERFERE
WE MUST MEET AT DESIGNATED PLACE
TWO REPRESENTATIVES TO BE CHOSEN
WEAR PROTECTION
TAPE REPLY
PLACE TAPE EXACT MAP REFERENCE
172 ×5816

The location was visited next day: it turned out to be a field just outside Swindon. The group had decided not to record a message on tape but to leave a written one: it wished to keep some control of the situation by declining to obey the instructions exactly.

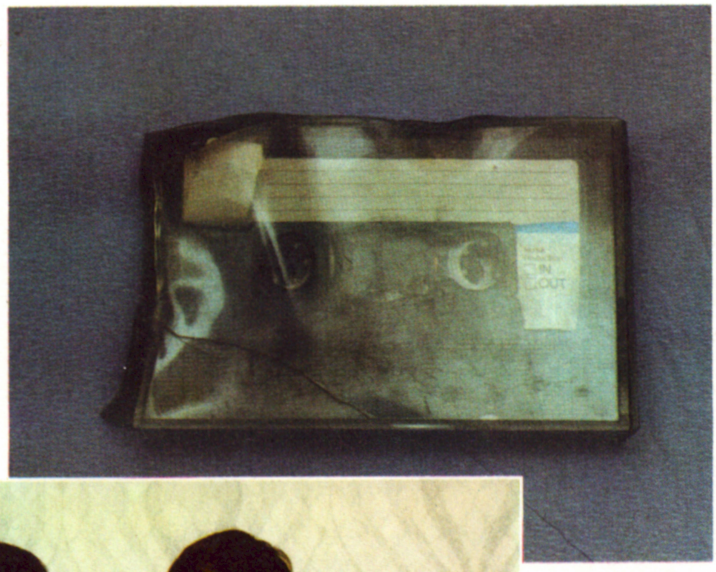
In the meantime, Charles Affleck had set up a cassette recorder next to his telephone, so that when the next telephone call came – this time at midnight – it was recorded. The message consisted of the same weird noises that had been heard before.

The next day Affleck and the present author listened to the recording over and over again, trying to make some sense of it. At first it sounded like electronic gibberish. Then, to their surprise, they heard what sounded like words. Listening very carefully, trying to ignore the other noises, they could pick out further words. The voice was eerie – almost frightening. It sounded non-human, mechanical. Eventually they made out the following message:

YOU ARE PRIMITIVE
WE ARE HERE TO WATCH YOU . . .
WE WILL JUDGE WHAT WE WANT
YOU ARE TOO CLOSE

Naturally, the investigators were taken aback by this. Sensing the issue might get out of hand, they approached the local police and told them what was happening. The police were not very interested and did no more than record the complaint.

The next message worried SCUFORI further. It said: 'DO NOT GO TO AUTHORITIES AGAIN OR ELSE.' How the sender knew the police had been contacted was a mystery. However, as the police were not going to help, the investigators decided to solve this matter themselves. They hoped they would get some answer to the letter they had left that might lead to something. The cassette case had disappeared from the location, despite the group's efforts to watch it whenever possible.



Left: one of SCUFORI's members reported that he had met a 'man in black' in the street – and found later that this tape cassette case, in his pocket at the time, had been partly melted

Below left: the members of SCUFORI. In the front row, from the left: the author, Terry Amey, Marty Moffatt. In the back row, from the left: Bob McGregor, Jan Wojtowicz, Charles Affleck. The mystery messages showed a disturbing familiarity with the group and its activities

The SCUFORI investigators like to think of themselves as very level-headed people, but these messages were beginning to scare them since they had no idea who could be behind them. The group's normal activities virtually came to a standstill.

Several days after the cassette case was taken from the field, a letter was received by Charles Affleck – again through the post. It was the paper that had been left in the

cassette case, bearing SCUFORI's message, along with the curt reply: 'WE WILL CONTACT YOU.' Soon another letter arrived. Its tone was far stronger. Here is an extract:

YOU THINK WE ARE CRANKS
WE WILL CHANGE YOUR MINDS . . .
THINGS WILL HAPPEN . . .
THIS IS A WARNING
WE ARE HERE FOR A PURPOSE
YOU ARE ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THINGS
YOU KNOW NOTHING OF
YOU WILL CEASE UFO STUDY
WE HAVE STOPPED OTHERS
WE WILL STOP YOU

Then to the complete amazement of the group, the message ended by listing the members' surnames.

It now seemed as though one of the group was leaking information. However, this idea was dismissed on the grounds that all the members knew each other so well.

On 15 September three further telephone calls were reported by Charles Affleck and SCUFORI members Jan Wojtowicz and Raymond Smithers. Affleck's call was made by the same horrible voice, but this time it seemed to be much angrier, telling SCUFORI to stop its investigations. Jan Wojtowicz's call consisted simply of weird electronic noises.

The story Raymond Smithers had to tell, though, was more interesting. He had been able to make out a map reference, which turned out to be a small track, 1 mile (1.6 kilometres) east of Avebury. The spot was visited by members of SCUFORI; on the ground they found the cassette case that had been left at the first location. It contained a blank piece of paper, which after various experiments proved to carry a message, written in ink visible only under ultra-violet light. The message said that 'they' would be willing to co-operate with SCUFORI and would send details of a meeting place.

Two days later a map reference was given in a telephone call, and a week after that a letter arrived with a message consisting of one word: 'HALLOWEEN'. There were also further telephone calls consisting of apparently meaningless messages and weird noises.

On Hallowe'en (Saturday night, 31 October) several SCUFORI members visited the location, West Woods, which is a small, isolated wood. They stayed there for some time and had one harrowing experience when they saw a white shape cross their path and disappear. But nothing further happened.

The group re-examined the messages, the times and dates of their arrival, and so on, in the hope that this might produce some clues. It was obvious that many of the group's activities were mentioned in the messages, and it became an inescapable possibility that one of the group might be in league with the mystery caller.

An excess of encounters

Smithers was the only group member who had not been present when the telephone calls were received. He claimed to have received calls himself, but no one else had been present on those occasions. He was also interested in electronic gadgets. It seemed incredible that he could be responsible, for he appeared to be as mystified as anyone else by the messages, but he was now felt to be worth watching.

Smithers then made a series of bizarre claims that strengthened the other group members' suspicions. First he presented a picture of a 'crashed UFO'. It showed a spherical object that, he claimed, he had come across while walking his dog close to

Bottom: some of the SCUFORI researchers maintaining surveillance on one of the locations at which their 'alien' correspondent had said that a message would be left. The people visible in the distance lingered in the area, arousing the ufologists' suspicions – but they were merely trippers, unconnected with the messages

Right: Charles Affleck, setting up the device he had constructed to catch a 'man in black'. The metal box contained a camera that would be triggered when the cassette case containing a message, lying nearby on a footbridge, was picked up. A steel shutter would then close, protecting the camera from the most determined attacker. The box was mounted on a pole buried in the ground, to prevent removal

Below: the mystery hoaxer, caught in the act as he lifted the cassette case. Though indistinct in the picture, he was recognisable to SCUFORI

his home. He had just had time to rush indoors, grab his Polaroid camera and use the last picture to snap the object before it rose into the air. Later investigation showed that the object was actually part of a sewage system.

On another occasion Smithers said that he had been stopped by an MIB on his way to a SCUFORI meeting. The man had touched his arm and caused the cassette case he was carrying to melt; later a rash appeared on that arm.

SCUFORI now set about trapping the culprit. Affleck built an ingenious device that would photograph the hoaxer. A cassette case was to be left at a location, placed on a microswitch connected to a camera and a flash unit. The camera, an Olympus OMI, was sealed inside a steel box, to the front of which a shutter device was fitted. The box was fixed on a pole, at the other end of which was a block of cement. The pole was buried in the ground, with the camera and flash unit pointing to the spot at which the cassette case was placed. When the case was picked up, the microswitch would be operated, and the camera and flash would go off, thus taking a picture of whoever picked up the case. Then the shutter would close in such a way that it would be impossible to re-open.

The trap was set up in yet another remote location. The investigators made sure that Smithers knew where they had left the cassette case. The device was tested several times, and the ufologists left.

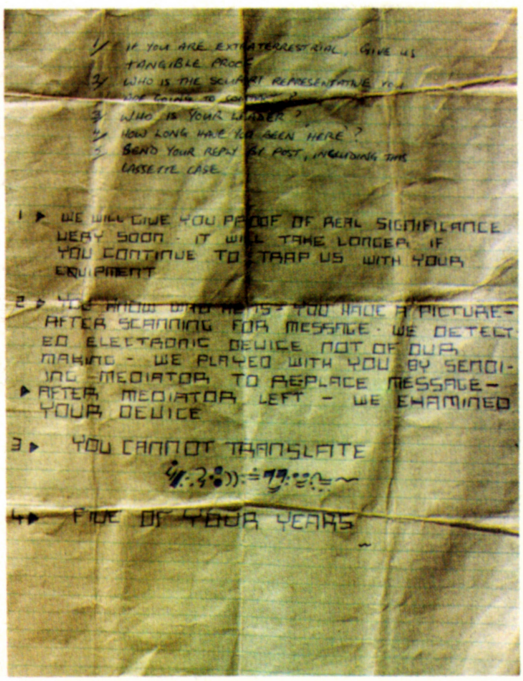
It *did* work, and the resulting photograph clearly showed Smithers picking up the cassette case. When SCUFORI members revisited the location, they found that the steel box, the pole and the attached block of concrete had been wrenched from the ground and dragged a short distance. The flash had instantly given away the presence of the camera, of course, and in his fury Smithers had found strength enough to perform the remarkable feat of uprooting the whole device. But he could not batter his way into the box, or drag the whole structure away.

Smithers was required to resign from SCUFORI. He claimed that he had perpetrated the hoax because he was himself being harassed: unless he caused the group to fold, harm would come to him. However, he produced no proof of this claim.

What is particularly surprising about Smithers's guilt is that he was a special constable in the police force and was training to be a state registered nurse. In most people's eyes these distinctions would presumably have proved him a very responsible citizen! (Incidentally, the name 'Raymond Smithers' is a pseudonym.)

SCUFORI now has a unique record of an MIB-type case; unusually, this one was solved. The affair proves that with determination and initiative one can get answers to a mystifying phenomenon.

Right: last of the mystery messages, sent after the incident with the remotely controlled camera had made it clear that the hoaxer could no longer hope to hide his identity. The message was written below a list of five questions from SCUFORI. The answer to the second question tried to keep up the bluff by pretending that the man shown in the picture was a 'mediator', and that the true originators of the messages remained unknown



Ministering angels?

Official British policy played its part in the creation of the myths that surrounded Mons. But eyewitness accounts of the retreat, reports MELVIN HARRIS, establish the truth about the stories of the angels

This British poster from the First World War reflects the belief that German forces had been guilty of countless outrages. One of those who spread atrocity stories most avidly was a nurse, Phyllis Campbell. And with equal enthusiasm she spread stories of angels appearing at Mons. The two kinds of rumour were linked in her mind, for as she asked: 'Is it strange that saints and angels should fight against this dreadful foe?'

NURSE PHYLLIS CAMPBELL, champion of the stories of angels intervening at Mons, wrote these words about the hated foe:

> When I saw the German prisoners . . . when they stood blinking in the sun with their square heads and putty-coloured faces, their colourless eyes and lashes, it suggested to me a creation of some monstrous spirit of evil. Is it strange that saints and angels should fight against this dreadful foe? I have seen no vision, but in my heart I believe that the Captains of God are leading the Allies to Victory.

And there we have a glimpse of Miss Campbell's secret. The Hun was so loathsome that anything could be used as a weapon against him – even lies. Used in a good cause – perhaps the greatest of all good causes – lies, rumours, half-truths and myths could stiffen people's resolve and make them that much more determined to stamp out the 'monstrous spirit of evil'.

At the time, of course, no one dared say that Miss Campbell was a liar. The lady was too well placed. In addition, she was a disarming, beguiling creature. She was described as 'extremely pretty, child-like and sensitive'. Another factor that stilled people's tongues was her record of devotion in the military hospitals.

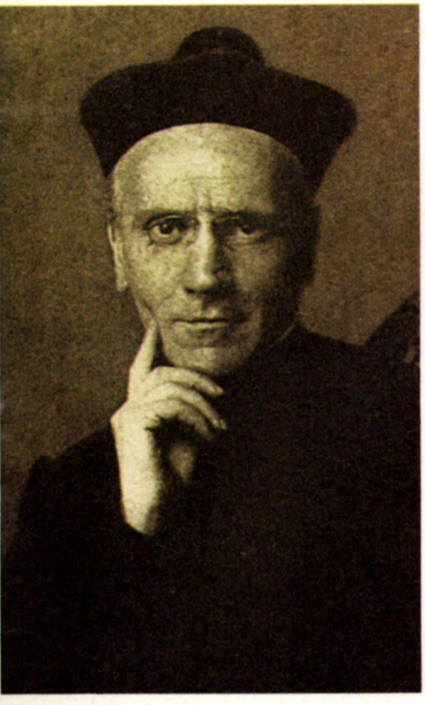
On the other hand, we have firm evidence that during the First World War some sweet young ladies and nurses were guilty of inventing the most incredible tales. We shall consider two examples.

On 16 September 1914, the *Star* reported the murder of nurse Grace Hume of Dumfries. Her hospital at Vilvoorde in Belgium had been overrun by the Germans. She had then been sadistically mutilated by two soldiers who cut off her breasts. Before dying she had scrawled a last note to her sister Kate and slipped it to a friend, nurse Mullard. Luckily, the Allies then liberated the remaining nurses, and faithful nurse Mullard made a pilgrimage to Dumfries to break the news.

Seven leading newspapers took up this

Weird sisters

The women volunteers who nursed the wounded in the First World War were held in high regard: this official picture (right) was reverently entitled: 'One who ministers to the wounded'. But among them were a few sensation-seeking women who *forced* such stories as that of the angels onto wounded soldiers. Vera Brittain (far right), a nurse at the time, writes in *Testament of youth*: 'The ladies seemed to try to outdo one another in telling of war horrors. . . . I was still too young to realise how much vicarious excitement the war provided for frustrated women . . . or to understand that the deliberate contemplation of horror and agony might strangely compensate a thwarted nature for the very real grief of having no one at the front for whom to grieve.' Such women were quick to press the wounded for tales of supernatural signs. Ordinary soldiers found they could enjoy 'posh' female attention by confirming such yarns.



Abbé Félix Klein worked with an ambulance division not far from Paris during the First World War. In his diaries he described the battle of Mons and included reports of the rumours that circulated among the troops. His account, like other reliable eyewitness reports, nowhere makes any mention of the angels of Mons

grim story, and the public was rightly enraged – but not for long. Within a few days it was found that nurse Hume was living happily and in one piece in Huddersfield. She had certainly volunteered for service at the front but had never been called on to go.

Following this, her sister Kate stood trial for uttering a forged letter, and it was proved that she had fabricated the whole story. The published letters from her sister and from 'nurse Mullard' were nothing but forgeries from her own hand.

Later on, ex-nurse Catto came up with another batch of horrors. She claimed to have nursed mutilated Belgians – children with their hands cut off, women with their breasts cut off. She even named the hospital where she had done this as Ramsgate General. But an investigation at that hospital showed that there was not a word of truth in her story.

The eyewitnesses' silence

These cases do no more than restore a correct perspective. They do not provide any proof of Miss Campbell's duplicity. To do this we need to contrast her story with competent accounts by people who lived through the retreat from Mons. Fortunately there is no shortage of these. Two accounts, though, will be sufficient. They are reports by ministers of religion, working as army chaplains – men who would have welcomed news of angelic aid, had it been forthcoming.

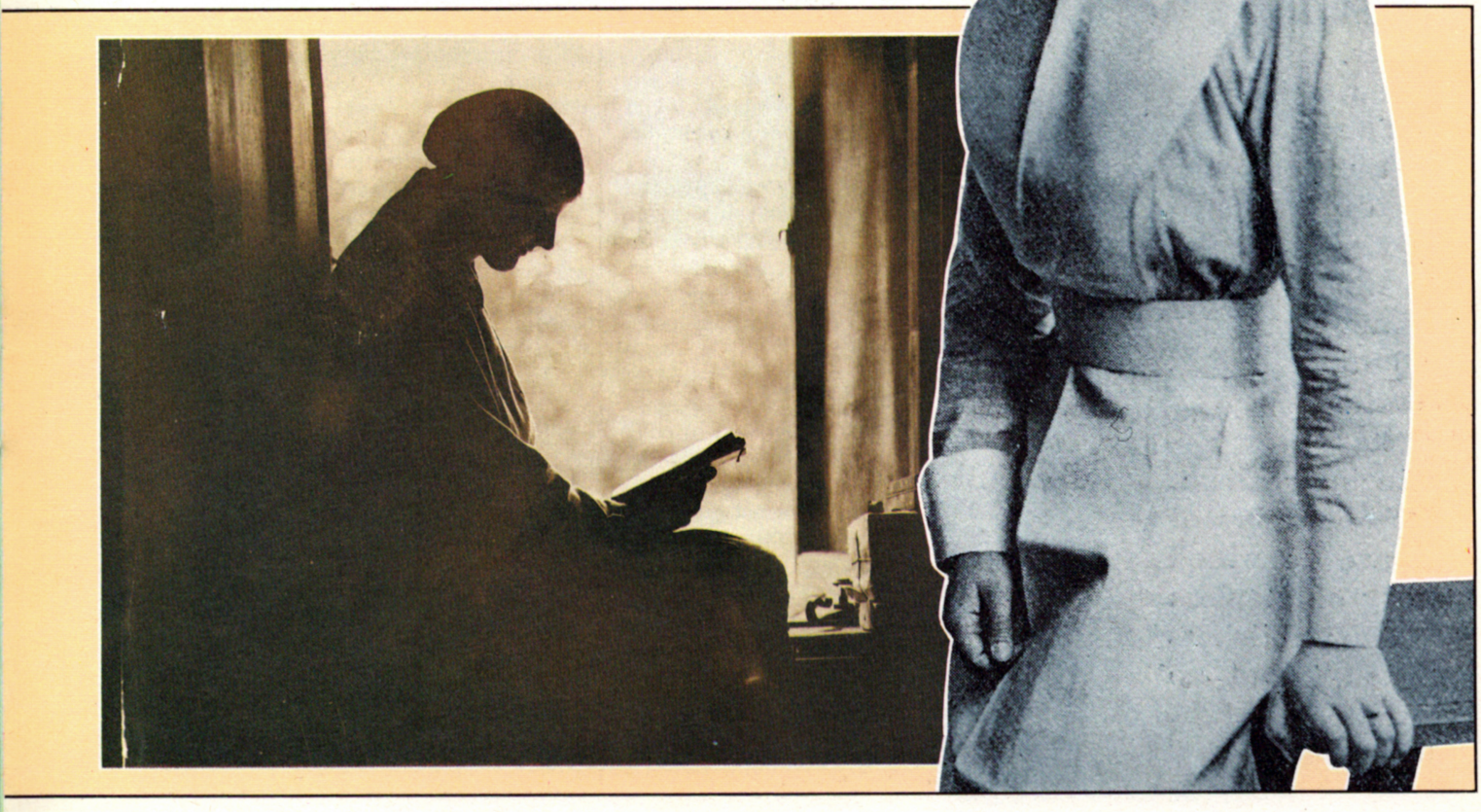
Abbé Félix Klein, a French Army chaplain, was attached to the Ambulance Division of the American Hospital at Neuilly, north-east of Paris. He writes that he:

> was privileged to go forth to gather in the wounded from the very Front . . . we went forth to it in the morning and came back from it in the evening . . . the wounded, brought back from [the battlefields] after twenty-four or forty-eight hours, retain an only too lively impression of them.

From 3 August to 28 December 1914 Abbé Klein kept a lengthy diary. In it he recorded the views and 'lively impressions' of the troops and details of the campaigns as they came in – including significant rumours. He even notes the famous rumour about Russian troops coming to the aid of the British Expeditionary Force. But *nowhere* does he mention any talk of divine intervention in the battles.

This is telling evidence; for nurse Campbell had endorsed *The Occult Review*'s claim that:

> No French paper would have made



Clouding the issue

Twelve years after the end of the First World War the inventive were still churning out fresh legends about Mons. In February 1930 an article appeared in a New York newspaper reporting the claim of one Colonel Friedrich Herzenwirth, described as a former member of the Imperial German Intelligence Service, that the angels really had appeared at Mons. But they had been nothing but motion picture images beamed onto cloudbanks by German aircraft equipped with enormously powerful projectors. The idea was to create panic among the British. 'What we had not figured on,' said the colonel, 'was that the English should turn the vision to their own benefit. This was a magnificent bit of counter-propaganda, for some of the English must have been fully aware of the mechanism of our trick. . . . Had the British command contented itself with simply issuing an Army order unmasking our trickery it would not have been half as effective.' However, the scheme had worked well against the Allies on the Russian front. 'Entire regiments who had beheld the vision fell upon their knees and flung away their rifles.' Within days of this claim, a spokesman from the German War Intelligence Department declared that the story was a hoax – and that Colonel Herzenwirth himself was a myth, or, if existing, was a liar!

> itself ridiculous by disputing the authenticity of what was vouched for by many thousands of independent eyewitnesses . . . whole battalions of French soldiers had seen apparitions of Joan of Arc . . . and St Michael.

Yet Abbé Klein, in daily touch with the troops during and after the retreat, had clearly never heard of any such talk, from any quarter. And his diary, entitled *La guerre vue d'une ambulance* when it was published in January 1915, recorded events as they happened. *The Occult Review*, by contrast, spoke of events over a year *after* they were alleged to have happened. And it failed to produce a single verifiable statement from any of the 'many thousands'.

A second significant body of evidence is provided by the record kept by a British chaplain, Owen Spencer Watkins. He was attached to the 14th Field Ambulance with the BEF. He was at Mons and took part in the retreat; his account was published in March 1915, under the title *With Field-Marshal French in France and Flanders*. It is a book rich in detail. But it lacks any mention whatsoever of the angels, either as realities or rumours.

Above: Arthur Machen, who possessed 'imagination and rather sinister genius in the region of short stories', as his adversary Harold Begbie conceded. Machen was in no doubt that his newspaper short story *The bowmen* was the origin of the angels of Mons; Begbie would have none of it

Left: a near-desperate appeal for more volunteers to enlist in the British Army. The need for more men impelled the censors to permit gloomy accounts of the military situation to be sent back home. One such account in *The Times* after Mons gravely disturbed the public and predisposed them to believe that their troops had been miraculously saved. And it also prompted Machen's *The bowmen*

So was the story of the angels nothing but imagination run riot? A great mythical tapestry woven from threads of hope, anguish and blind patriotism? No – there was much more to it than that, more even than the stimulus provided by Arthur Machen's story *The bowmen*. For behind the angels myth lay an even greater myth. One created by the government itself – in the interests of recruiting.

An official myth

This government myth went into print on Sunday 30 August 1914, in a special Sunday edition of *The Times*. It was conveyed in a heart-rending despatch from the newspaper's correspondent Arthur Moore in France. It was headlined 'Fiercest fight in history'. It opened with the poignant words: 'This is a pitiful story I have to write. Would to God it did not fall to me to write it.' And the body of the story spoke of 'very great losses', of 'a retreating broken army', of German troops so numerous 'that they could no more be stopped than the waves of the sea.' These were words that shocked the nation.

Arthur Moore had been swept away by fierce emotions. His piece was a misinterpretation, based on muddled, incomplete information, exaggerations and misunderstandings. The government itself knew far better. Things were nowhere near as bad as the despatch made out, and losses were by no means as great as Moore imagined. Normally such a despairing piece would have been slashed to pieces by the official censor. Yet this despatch was passed with the full approval of officialdom. For there was an awareness that fresh recruits were urgently

needed. The public needed to be shaken sharply out of its complacency. So this sincere but misleading despatch was waved through – with blessings!

More than that, it was furnished with a new ending, written by F.E. Smith, director of the Government Press Bureau. This read:

> England should realise, and should realise at once, that she must send reinforcements, and still send them. Is an army of exhaustless valour to be borne down by sheer weight of numbers, while young Englishmen at home play golf and cricket? We want men and we want them now.

The ploy worked. Britain stiffened her backbone, and the recruits poured in. But from then on, the myth of the battle of Mons as 'the clash that saved civilisation' grew in stature, while the contributions of the French and Belgians were undervalued.

And this dramatic despatch inspired two trains of thought that led directly to the angels legend. For Machen's *Bowmen* was written after he had been moved by the anguished words of Arthur Moore. And people at large began to reason that, if the British had escaped from such an enormous enemy force, it was nothing short of a *miraculous* event. From then on, nothing could stop the gradual growth of speculation and fantasy.

In short, there was a desperate need to believe in the rightness of the Allied cause. And divine intervention was surely the ultimate proof of such rightness. As *The Christian Commonwealth* observed, proof of angelic aid

> would strengthen religious faith, which has been greatly weakened by the war, and would reinforce belief in the justice of the cause for which so many men fell during that magnificent retreat and almost miraculous recovery on the banks of the Marne.

In the years after the war, as the real events at Mons became forgotten, people grew even more reckless. It became easy to find 'witnesses' who had claimed to have seen those angels, and many inventive yarns were spun about their doings. But it was very different in 1915, at a time when these events were supposed to have been 'vouched for by many thousands'. As Machen pointed out in the August of that year:

> It's been claimed that 'everybody' who fought from Mons to Ypres saw the apparitions. If that be so, it is odd that nobody has come forward to testify at first hand to the most amazing event of his life. Many men have been back from the Front, we have many wounded in hospital, many soldiers have written home. And they have all combined, this great host, to keep silence about the most wonderful of occurrences, the aspiring assurance, the surest omen of victory.

Twenty-five years later Machen was not so kind. He had grown weary of the contradictions and the failures of those who discussed the matter to grasp the requirements of worthwhile evidence. And when he looked back on the assorted angels stories he said: 'There was not one word of truth in them, those stories were lies. Everyone of them lies, sir!'

But this author would prefer a more charitable verdict. Let us call it 'tragic self-deception' – and leave it at that!

Further reading

Harold Begbie, *On the side of the angels*, Hodder and Stoughton 1915

Arthur Machen, *Tales of horror and the supernatural*, Panther 1975

Ralph Shirley, *The angel warriors at Mons*, Newspaper Publicity Co. 1915

Battle-weary British soldiers of the First World War on the march. Literally thousands of men were alleged to have seen the angels of Mons: yet ironically it seems to have been among the civilians that the tale was originated, embellished and vigorously defended

The terror of Croglin Grange

The macabre story of a shrivelled, bony creature that attacked a young woman by night suggested that a fiend with a lust for blood was loose in Victorian England. COLIN GODMAN examines the tale of the Croglin vampire

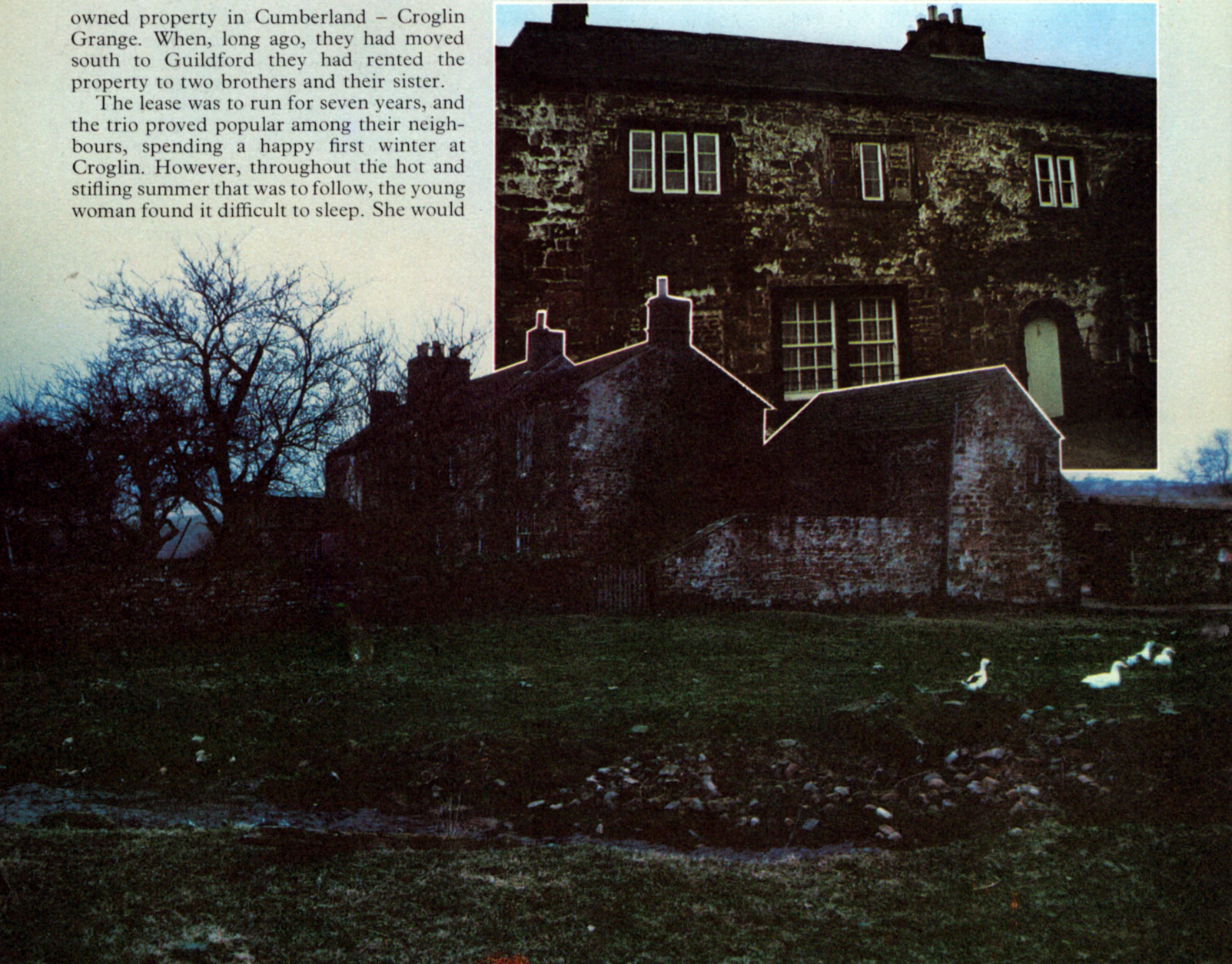
APART FROM MEDIEVAL LEGENDS of the vampire, the British Isles have been curiously free of that particular plague. Free, that is, until 1900 when Augustus Hare's tale of vampirism in Cumberland (now Cumbria) was first published. Many writers have quoted it but few have attempted to trace the creature to its lair. The trail left by Hare has proved difficult to follow.

The vampire of Croglin Grange makes its appearance in the fourth volume of Hare's autobiography, *The story of my life*. The book is a rambling series of anecdotes, tall stories and excerpts from his journal. The vampire story had originated with a Captain Fisher, who said his ancestors had once owned property in Cumberland – Croglin Grange. When, long ago, they had moved south to Guildford they had rented the property to two brothers and their sister.

The lease was to run for seven years, and the trio proved popular among their neighbours, spending a happy first winter at Croglin. However, throughout the hot and stifling summer that was to follow, the young woman found it difficult to sleep. She would lie in bed gazing out at the moonlit lawn beyond her window. One night she saw a creature dart from the shadows; in a moment it was at her window scratching at the glass. The window was shut fast, but the figure began picking away at the lead. A pane of glass was loosened and fell into the room. A long bony finger released the catch; and the creature was in the room. Twisting its shrivelled fingers through her hair it dragged her towards it then bit her on the throat.

The woman's screams alerted her brothers, who chased the vampire out of the house, across the lawn and over the neighbouring churchyard wall. Although the woman's wound was to heal in time, her doctor urged a change of scene; the siblings decided to holiday in Switzerland.

When the young woman had recovered, the threesome returned to Croglin, and the following winter passed without event. Then, one night in March, the young woman



Croglin Low Hall in Cumbria, supposedly the original of the Croglin Grange in Captain Fisher's vampire story. But his description of the house, with its veranda, lawns and elegant trees, does not seem to match the forbidding granite construction of Croglin Low Hall, or the barren landscape that surrounds it

was woken by a scratching at her window. The creature was there again: this time her screams brought her brothers running to the rescue armed with pistols. In the ensuing mêlée the creature was hit in the leg but, despite this, it managed to evade capture. However, the men did see where it went to ground – in an old family vault in the churchyard.

The following day the local villagers opened the vault and found a horrible scene of broken coffins and mangled corpses. Only one coffin stood intact. When the lid was prised open

> there, brown, shrivelled, mummified but quite entire, was the same hideous figure which had looked in at the windows of Croglin Grange, with the marks of a recent pistol shot in the leg. And they did the only thing that can lay a vampire: they burnt it.

This is how Augustus Hare concluded his account of Captain Fisher's narrative. England had acquired its first authenticated vampire, and the story was soon being included in anthologies of British hauntings.

Above: mangled corpses in broken coffins, similar to the scene that greeted the eyes of the Cumberland villagers when they opened the vault in which the vampire had gone to ground

Party pieces

Augustus Hare and Captain Edward Fisher had first met in June 1874 on the eve of the latter's marriage to Hare's cousin Lady Victoria Liddel. At dinner Hare, a renowned raconteur, told alarming ghost stories that he had collected during his wide travels in Europe. Fisher seemed compelled to relate a story of his own. He began by telling the assembled company that his family had not always lived at Thorncombe near Guildford. Then must have followed the vampire tale much as Hare related it in his autobiography. Hare was proud of his memory and the mass of detail he invariably included in his writings – indeed, to his publishers' despair, he refused to cut any of his material.

Only a little is known of Fisher's later life. Following his marriage in July he made his home at Thorncombe, an elegant estate 5 miles (8 kilometres) from Guildford, where he continued to charm Hare as 'one of the kindest, cheeriest, pleasantest fellows who ever entered a family'. Fisher, whose full name and title were 'Edward Rowe Fisher-Rowe, Late Captain of the 4th Dragoon Guards', was to die at Thorncombe on his seventy-seventh birthday, on 8 November 1909. His wife lies by his side in Holy Trinity Church at Bramley; she died in 1935.

What of Fisher's ancestors – did they really own a Croglin Grange? Twelve miles (19 kilometres) south-east of Carlisle is Croglin Water, a lonely Cumberland stream. Wordsworth's poem establishes its setting:

> Down from the Pennine Alps, how
> fiercely sweeps
> Croglin, the stately Eden's tributary!

However, investigations into whether there is a Croglin Grange reveal that there is no house by that name, only a scatter of lonely

Below: Augustus Hare, who first published the story of the Croglin vampire in 1900 in the fourth volume of his autobiography

farm houses of which one, Croglin Low Hall, is the main contender for the title. Parish records and gravestones reveal that the Fishers were the local landowners and farmers certainly as far back as the 1730s. It is possible that Captain Fisher could have been the grandson of Edward Fisher (1762–1833) and his wife Deborah, whose memorials stand in Ainstable graveyard.

The Bramley parish records suggest that there were no Fishers at Thorncombe before the Captain moved there, so his suggestion that his family went south many generations earlier is misleading. Equally misleading is his description of Croglin Grange's veranda, lawns and elegant trees. The heavy granite walls of Croglin Low Hall and the barren landscape that surrounds the building certainly do not spell elegance, and there are neither lawns nor verandas; the cobbled yards suggest the Hall was a working farm.

There are other discrepancies, too. Either Fisher or Hare was wrong about the churchyard. There is a church at Croglin, a Victorian building on the site of a Norman church. It is, however, almost 2 miles (3 kilometres) from Croglin Low Hall, high on a hill above Croglin Water; a prodigious run for the healthiest vampire. At this point we have to face the facts: the Croglin Grange of the story retold by Hare is not the Croglin that exists in Cumberland. It may be that Hare invented details to enhance a sketchy description given by Fisher, or that the Captain, not wishing his aristocratic friends to know he came from humble farming stock, deliberately misled the assembled company to gain his family a more stately origin. Oddly, Hare's description of the Grange matches the Thorncombe estate – Fisher's

Above: tombstones in Ainstable graveyard, near Croglin Low Hall, reveal that Fishers had been living in the area since the 1730s

home in Surrey – in many respects.

Allowing then that Hare got his geography and his dates wrong, the existence of the three tenants and their uninvited summer visitor has still to be substantiated. The letting of the Grange to the anonymous tenants would certainly appear to be a fiction; but where did Fisher find his vampire?

A romantic fiction

The present author believes it is necessary to look no further than the work of James Malcolm Rymer (1804–1882). Rymer was a writer of extremely successful 'penny dreadfuls'. In 1847 *Varney the vampire, or the feast of blood*, a romance in 220 chapters, made its first appearance. In 1853 its 868 pages were reprinted in 'penny parts'; they were to capture the public's imagination, inspiring ballads, songs and theatrical melodrama.

Varney was not quite the first of the genre. In 1816 the story-telling sessions that inspired Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein* had also given birth to John Polidori's *The vampyre*, a short story published three years later. There were no vampire tales in Britain prior to this date despite the European vampire 'epidemic' of the 1700s. Although the story of *Varney* is well-known, the text virtually disappeared until it was republished in America in 1974, and it must be supposed that earlier writers overlooked the strange similarities between Varney and the Croglin vampire.

Let us compare the two vampires' first appearance. Fisher sets his action in a ground-floor bedroom of a country house on a hot summer's night. Rymer's location is a medieval chamber in a city during a hailstorm. Both rooms have large fastened windows. Fisher's heroine is awake, watching a shadowy figure on the lawn; Rymer's girl sleeps through the storm but wakes to the sound of fingernails drumming on the glass. She thinks it is the sound of hailstones until she sees a figure standing on her window ledge. Fisher's girl is horrified by scratching and picking at her window. Varney breaks a small pane of glass, and the Croglin vampire picks the lead from around a small diamond pane to gain entry.

Both vampires slip in bony fingers to release their catches and open their windows. We recalll how Fisher's vampire twisted its long bony hands into the girl's hair, dragging her to the side of the bed so it could bite her throat. What of Varney's technique? This is Rymer's version:

> . . . the figure seized the long tresses of her hair, and twining them round his bony hands he . . . drags her head to the bed's edge. He forces it back by the long hair still entwined in his grasp. With a plunge he seizes her neck in his fang-like teeth: a gush of blood and a hideous sucking noise follows.

As long ago as 1929 Montague Summers quoted both texts in *The vampire in Europe* but failed to comment on the curious similarities. He must have noted them but preferred not to 'lay' Croglin's ghost.

The present owners of Croglin Low Hall say they have a ghost of a pig, but reject the vampire story absolutely. It may appear heartless to deny England her only vampire but it seems its origin lay not in Cumberland, but in the pages of Rymer's book.

Below: an illustration from James Rymer's *Varney the vampire* published in 1847

Just one of those things

The Spontaneous Cases Group consists of a number of researchers interested in spontaneously occurring psi events. One of their members is Julian Isaacs, who has championed the case for teleportation as an event that occurs far more frequently in daily life than most investigators suspect. The chairman of the group, Maurice Grosse, experiences spontaneous teleportation frequently: it often involves the disappearance and reappearance of his pen. The group has accordingly set up Project JOTT (so christened by Mary Rose Barrington; it stands for 'just one of those things'), which will collect and study stories of the mysterious wanderings of objects. The cases may involve objects that disappear and are never seen again; or that turn up in places that they 'could not' be – such as a spot that had already been searched thoroughly but fruitlessly. The Spontaneous Cases Group would like to receive full reports from people who can speak of JOTT incidents at first hand, or who have had cases described to them by reliable informants. The ideal report would give the date of the incident and would be supported by the statement of a witness. If possible, the reports should be typed on A4 paper.

Mrs Anita S. noticed that her gold bracelet (above right) had disappeared from her wrist. Thorough searches failed to disclose it. Mrs S. is sometimes aware of the presence of the deceased former owner of the house, Mrs Marsh: as a last resort, Mrs S. called on her aid. Immediately she saw the bracelet (right) – in a spot she had searched repeatedly!

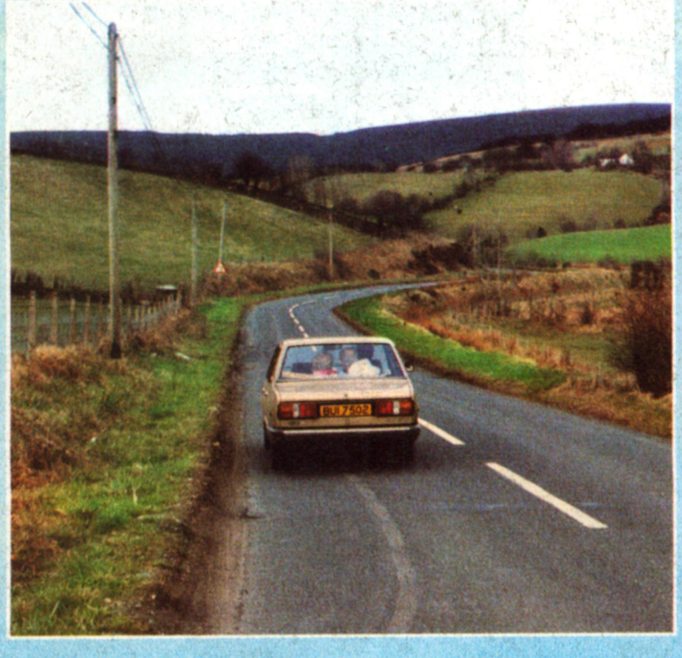
Mr and Mrs W. received a letter from their daughter, mentioning that her watch, a gift from them, was broken. About two months later they came across the watch (below), on a shelf in their outside toilet. The watch had apparently been teleported well over 100 miles (160 kilometres) from the jewellery box in which the daughter kept it (bottom)

Isaacs has been encouraged in his belief that spontaneous teleportation may be frequent by the numerous reports of such incidents that he has received from his PK subjects (see page 2794). Generally such incidents are disregarded after a few moments' puzzlement and soon forgotten. But as Mary Rose Barrington writes, 'Who knows? Perhaps a significant body of material is seeping away round our ankles while we scan the horizon for news of the paranormal.' However, the group requests that before a report is sent in, correspondents should consider carefully whether the incidents could have been cases of pseudo-JOTT – failing to keep one's wits about one. If the case seems to stand up to such scrutiny, the report should be sent to: **Project Jott, c/o the SPR, 1 Adam and Eve Mews, London W8 6UG.**

This side up

Winding through the rolling green hills of County Tyrone, Northern Ireland, is a stretch of road where things are not as they seem. Going uphill, a car rolls upward of its own accord; going downhill, it first comes to a halt, and then begins to roll gently backwards. A member of *The Unexplained* editorial team visited the 'strange brae'

Leaving the village of Gortin on the Omagh road, you reach the strange brae after $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles (6 kilometres). Rounding a corner to the right, you come across a stretch of road, perhaps 200 yards (180 metres) long, rising in a gentle incline to what seems to be the crest of a hill (bottom). Stop your car, switch off the engine and release the hand-brake – and your car will begin to roll gently forward *up* the hill. Facing the other way, too, strange things happen: although you seem clearly to be facing down the hill, your car begins to roll backward – again, *up*hill (inset).



What is the explanation? Local people have various suggestions: some believe the whole phenomenon is due to an optical illusion; others think magnetism is to blame; still others are inclined to put it down to the leprechauns.

Is it an optical illusion? Perhaps. The strange brae is certainly deceptive. Our sense of perspective is derived ultimately from our perception of gravity, and it has been suggested that a variation in the strength of the gravitational field causes an optical illusion. However, interviewed on the programme *Nature's way* on Londonderry's local Radio Foyle by Ollie McGilloway, physicist Lexie Burns was quick to dismiss this hypothesis. A rough calculation of the extent to which the geology of the area could influence the strength of the force of gravity yielded a maximum variation of no more than one part in a thousand – not enough to cause such a distortion in perspective.

What, then, of magnetism? At the 'magnetic brae' in Ayrshire, Scotland (see page 2269), it was originally thought that magnetic ore in the surrounding hills exerted so strong an attraction that it could actually pull cars uphill. Such an explanation seems unlikely – and in the case of the Gortin road, it is definitely wrong. For water poured onto the surface of the road also runs uphill.

Lexie Burns had a subtler suggestion. Research seems to show that our sense of balance is in some way dependent upon a sensitivity to the Earth's magnetic field. If so, it could be that a local variation in that field could cause distortion in our perception of perspective. The magnetic field could be responsible, not for pulling cars up hills, but for the optical illusion that suggests that downhill is up.

Or perhaps, after all, it's the leprechauns.